

Evaluating Human Demographics and Attitudes Toward Sexual Orientation

An Honors Thesis (PSYS 499)

by

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## Abstract

Attitudes towards lesbians and gay men have become important issues both politically and socially as the topic of sexual orientation becomes less taboo throughout society. This study examined which human demographics, such as race, age, or religious affiliation, had stronger correlations to attitudes towards lesbians and gay men. Also, the study combined multiple demographics to identify which combinations of demographics are strongly correlated with attitudes towards lesbians and gay men.

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### Evaluating Human Demographics and Attitudes Toward Sexuality

As multicultural studies increase in importance across educational and social settings, more emphasis is placed on attitudes toward marginalized groups. Political controversy surrounding gay marriage has brought lesbians and gay men into the forefront of this emphasis. It is necessary to evaluate which demographic groups hold negative and positive attitudes towards these marginalized groups in order to focus on changing negative attitudes and preventing discrimination. The purpose of the current study is to determine which demographic groups generally have stronger negative attitudes towards lesbians and gay men. Other purposes include establishing a basic overview of current attitudes about lesbians and gay men and examining different demographic combinations in relation to these attitudes.

#### **Human Demographics**

Sociosexuality has not been examined in comparison to attitudes toward sexuality (Mouilso & Calhoun, 2012). Sociosexuality is defined as how people view their own sexuality. Restricted sociosexuality is defined as a desire for commitment, closeness in relationships, and few sexual partners. Unrestricted sociosexuality is defined as having many sexual partners and no desire for commitment. Mouilso and Calhoun examined the relationship between sociosexuality and sexual aggression and found a positive association between sociosexuality and psychopathy and narcissism.

Gender is a trait that was studied when determining attitudes toward sexuality (Martinez & Hebl, 2012; Raja & Stokes, 1998; Whitley & Kite, 1995). The results of past research on this trait vary greatly. When accessing comfort levels of military members while working with openly gay service members, no gender differences were found to significantly affect attitudes (Martinez & Hebl, 2012). In contrast, Whitley and Kite (1995) found that men held more

negative views of gay men and lesbians than women. While men had more negative views towards lesbians and gay men, there was a larger difference in attitudes about gay men. When the attitudes were measured towards lesbians, men had less negative views that were similar to those of women. Also, Whitley and Kite (1995) found that those who believe in more traditional gender roles are more prejudiced against lesbians and gay men than those who do not believe in traditional roles. After combining the traits of gender and sexual orientation, Raja and Stokes (1998) found that heterosexual males had the most negative views towards gay men than any other gender/sexual orientation combination.

Whitley (2009) discussed the relationship between religiosity and attitudes toward sexuality. He found a positive correlation between religiosity and prejudice against lesbians and gay males. Participants who followed a fundamentalist approach to religion also had higher levels of prejudice. Although Whitley did not study other demographics in connection to attitudes toward sexuality, he included them as moderator variables. Whitley found that the presence of these moderators did not change the correlations between religiosity and prejudice.

Past researchers studied specific demographics in relation to attitudes toward sexuality, but did not combine demographics. One trait that was not often studied was age. Past researchers often studied only college students, which did not give a broad range of ages to examine (Mouilso & Calhoun, 2012; Raja & Stokes, 1998; Whitley, 2009). Whitley and Kite (1995) found that for men, there was no significant difference in attitudes across age. Marital/relationship status and whether children are present in the family have also not been examined by past research in relations to attitudes about sexual orientation.

### **Attitudes Toward Sexual Orientation**

Attitudes towards sexuality is a topic encompassing a broad range of beliefs and aspects of sexuality, such as orientation or comfort in sexual expression. Raja and Stokes (1998) focused their “Modern Homophobia Scale” specifically on attitudes towards gay men and lesbians. Similarly, Whitley and Kite (1995) focused the orientation aspect of their study on lesbians and gay men as well. Past research commonly focused on only these two orientations.

When studying attitudes towards gay men and lesbians, Whitley and Kite (1995) found that there were large differences in the positivity of attitudes towards lesbians versus gay men. Attitudes toward gay men were typically less positive than those toward lesbians. Whitley and Kite found that when the attitude measures for lesbians and gay men were combined, responses revealed smaller sex differences. These findings were consistent with findings about attitudes towards civil liberties for gays and lesbians. When studying religiosity, Whitley (2009) also found differences in attitudes about lesbians and attitudes about gay men that were similar to the general findings of Whitley and Kite.

Whitley and Kite (1995) found that those who believed in more traditional gender roles were more likely to show prejudice against lesbians and gay men. An idea often coinciding with traditional and non-traditional gender roles was the belief about the nature of homosexuality. These beliefs are also important when discussing religious beliefs and affiliations. Whitley (2009) found that beliefs about the nature of homosexuality were important in shaping people’s attitudes toward lesbians and gay men. Participants who believed that homosexuality is genetic, for example, may have more positive attitudes towards lesbians and gay men than those who believed it is a personal choice.

Whitley (2009) also found that those who view lesbians and gay men as a perceived threat had more negative attitudes towards them than someone who does not see a threat. Raja

and Stokes (1998) found that those with an acquaintance who is gay or lesbian had less discomfort towards lesbians and gay men in general. In studying members of the military, Martinez and Hebl (2012) found that members generally did not feel uncomfortable working closely with gay men. This supports the results of Raja and Stokes. However, the military members were not completely without discomfort. Some members did indicate discomfort around openly gay members but did not report having negative beliefs or acting negatively towards them. Martinez and Hebl (2012) found that comfort levels were higher amongst military members when the member being discussed was portrayed as gay. One suggested reasoning for this result was that the members had faked positive attitudes in order to not appear prejudiced. Martinez and Hebl also mentioned that if these positive attitudes were faked, it could also be a reason for the lower levels of discriminatory behaviors toward openly gay service members in real settings.

### **Scales and Surveys**

Scales within surveys were the most common instruments used in previous research on both human demographics and attitudes toward sexuality (Mouilso & Calhoun, 2012; Penke & Asendorpf, 2008; Plante, 2010; Raja & Stokes, 1998; Whitley, 2009). No previous studies had scales combining both demographics and attitudes toward sexuality. Whitley discussed surveys containing religiosity and attitudes toward sexuality as main variables and demographics as moderator variables. However, no studies contained demographics, sociosexuality, and religiosity all as main variables.

Raja and Stokes (1998) developed the “Modern Homophobia Scale” to examine attitudes towards lesbians and gay men. This 5-point scale focused on beliefs about lesbians and gay men instead of acts and behaviors toward these groups. One limitation of this scale was the small

sample of behavior measures that leaves room for misrepresentations due to self-report. The scale was found to be reliable through testing with a sample group. Also, scale items were randomly ordered to prevent participants from responding the same to similar questions based on question memory. Raja and Stokes' survey was found to be strong in validity based on significant correlations to other scales.

Religiosity and socio-sexuality were two human demographics that were measured with their own specific scales in previous research (Mouilso & Calhoun, 2012; Penke & Asendorpf, 2008; Plante, 2010). Whitley (2009) explained that when using religious affiliation as a demographic it is important to establish a solid operational definition of religious affiliation. In the "Santa Clara Strength of Faith Questionnaire," Plante (2010) operationally defined religious affiliation, or religiosity, as the importance of both intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of religion to a person. "The Santa Clara Strength of Faith Questionnaire" is a 10-item scale used in medical, educational and cross-country settings. One criticism of the scale is that it may be more "state" related than "trait" related. The scale was found to be high in both reliability and convergent validity.

The most widely used measure of sociosexuality is the Sociosexuality Orientation Inventory (Mouilso & Calhoun, 2012). Because the survey is self-report, one criticism is that it may not accurately represent people's behaviors and beliefs. The scale is also only 7-items long. However, the scale has been found to have good convergent and discriminant validity, as well as internal consistency. Because of these limitations, a revised version of the Sociosexuality Orientation Inventory was created (Penke & Asendorpf, 2008). This scale is more differential than the original inventory. Penke and Asendorpf focused on three components instead of using a uni-dimensional scale. These components include behavior, attitude, and desire. Participants



were studied to test the scale, finding it more reliable and valid than the original inventory. One limitation of the scale is that it cannot be used to understand specific motives for sociosexual attitudes.

### **Present Research**

Past research has been done on certain demographics and their correlation to attitudes toward sexuality (Martinez & Hebl, 2012; Raja & Stokes, 1998; Whitley, 2009; Whitley & Kite, 1995). However, past research was focused on other hypotheses and not necessarily the actual relationship between all demographics and attitudes (Whitley, 2009). Also, it did not combine the demographics to establish relationships for different combinations. Past research often focused on attitudes toward sexuality for specific populations of people, for example, those enlisted in the military, instead of looking at the broader population (Martinez & Hebl, 2012). In contrast, the current study looks at a wider population and combines demographics to examine relationships between multiple aspects of a person's identity and their attitudes toward sexuality. Present research will not examine the presence of children in the family as a demographic. Also, because most of the past research on sexuality does not include much information about the direct relationships between demographics and attitudes towards sexual orientation, most hypotheses made in the present research are exploratory.

### **Hypotheses**

Single participants' scores on sociosexuality will be positively correlated with attitudes toward lesbians and gay men. This hypothesis was developed on the basis that those with higher scores on sociosexuality tend to have less conventional views about sexuality and may therefore be more open to differing sexual orientations. African American participants' scores on religiosity will be negatively correlated with attitudes towards lesbians and gay men. This

hypothesis was developed on the basis that those with high religiosity have been found to have more negative attitudes towards lesbians and gay men. Heterosexual males will have the most negative attitudes towards lesbians and gay men than any other sexual orientation/ gender combination.

## Method

### Participants

Approximately 100 undergraduate participants were recruited from Ball State University through the department subject pool. Participants were given 1 hour of research credit towards their course requirement.

### Materials

Data was collected through an online questionnaire on the website Qualtrics. The questionnaire consisted of three previously developed scales measuring sociosexuality, religiosity, and attitudes towards lesbians and gay men. Also within the questionnaire were a section of questions to measure participant demographics including gender, race, sexual orientation, and age. See *Appendix A* for a complete list of the demographic items.

**Santa Clara strength of religious faith questionnaire.** Participants were given a 10-item survey. Religiosity was measured using a 4-point Likert scale (1= *strongly disagree* and 4= *strongly agree*). The survey included items such as “I pray daily.” and “I look to my faith as a source of comfort.” Past research has found the questionnaire to have high internal consistency and split-half reliability scores, making it high in reliability overall (Plante, 2010). The questionnaire has also been found to have high validity. Correlations have been found between this study and other specifically intrinsic or specifically extrinsic measures of religiosity (Plante, 2010).

**The modern homophobia scale.** Participants were given a 46-item survey measuring their attitudes towards lesbians and gay men. The survey consisted of 22 items measuring attitudes towards gay men and 24 items measuring attitudes towards lesbians. The scale measured attitudes across three factors including deviance/changeability, rights, and socializing. Attitudes towards lesbians and gay men were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1= *strongly disagree* and 5= *strongly agree*). This survey included items such as “I am comfortable with the thought of two men being romantically involved,” “Lesbians are as capable as heterosexuals of forming long-term romantic relationships,” and “I would not mind working with a lesbian.” The survey was found to be high in validity due to significant correlations to other studies measuring attitudes toward sexuality (Raja & Stokes, 1998).

**The revised sociosexual orientation inventory.** A 9-item scale was given to participants to measure sociosexuality. Number of partners was measured on a 9-point Likert scale (1= *zero* and 9= *20 or more*). Attitudes towards casual sex were measured on a 9-point Likert scale (1= *strongly disagree* and 9= *strongly agree*). Frequency of sexual fantasies was also measured on a 9-point Likert scale (1= *never* and 9= *at least once a day*). Items included “With how many different partners have you had sex within the past 12 months?” “Sex without love is OK.” and “How often do you have fantasies about having sex with someone with whom you do not have a committed romantic relationship?” Factor analyses were run on the scale to test for its reliability. Penke and Asendorpf (2008) found the inventory to be highly reliable in measuring sociosexuality.

## **Procedure**

Participants answered an online questionnaire through a link they receive. The order of the four sections of the questionnaire was randomized for each participant. A brief explanation of

the subject matter of the study was presented at the beginning of the questionnaire so that participants could decide whether or not they felt comfortable responding to the questions. Also, participants provided their name and student identification number for use when giving research credit. The names and identification numbers were not connected to the participant's responses. At the end of the questionnaire, participants had the option of receiving 1 hour of class research credit.

## **Results**

### **Relationship Status and Sociosexuality**

A Pearson correlation indicated that for singles, sociosexuality was negatively correlated to attitudes towards gay men,  $r(89) = -.388, p < .01$ . For single participants, unrestricted sociosexuality was correlated with negative attitudes towards lesbians and gay men. Also, among singles, there was a significant negative correlation between sociosexuality and attitudes towards lesbians,  $r(89) = -.416, p < .01$ . A Pearson correlation indicated that for singles, sociosexuality was negatively correlated to religiosity,  $r(89) = -.338, p < .01$ . This finding did not support the original hypothesis.

### **Race and Religiosity**

A Pearson correlation indicated that for African Americans, religiosity was negatively correlated to attitudes towards gay men,  $r(3) = -.899, p < .05$ . Although the percentage of African Americans in the sample was small, this correlation was found to be significant. This supported the original hypothesis. However, no significant correlation was found between religiosity and attitudes towards lesbians.

### **Gender and Attitudes Towards Lesbians and Gay Men**

An independent samples t-test indicated that heterosexual females ( $M = 27.81$ ,  $SD = 8.56$ ) scored higher on religiosity than non-heterosexual women ( $M = 17.78$ ,  $SD = 7.48$ ),  $t(70) = -3.33$ ,  $p < .01$ . Heterosexual females ( $M = 21.54$ ,  $SD = 11.83$ ) scored lower on sociosexuality than non-heterosexual women ( $M = 32.78$ ,  $SD = 15.12$ ),  $t(70) = 2.57$ ,  $p < .05$ . An independent samples t-test indicated that heterosexual females ( $M = 47.29$ ,  $SD = 19.07$ ) scored higher on attitudes towards lesbians than non-heterosexual females ( $M = 28.56$ ,  $SD = 5.00$ ),  $t(70) = -2.92$ ,  $p < .01$ . Heterosexual females ( $M = 41.05$ ,  $SD = 17.26$ ) scored higher on attitudes towards gay men than non-heterosexual females ( $M = 25.89$ ,  $SD = 17.26$ ),  $t(70) = -2.61$ ,  $p < .05$ . See *Figure 1* for differences in heterosexual and non-heterosexual female scores. No significant findings were reported for heterosexual men and their attitudes towards lesbians and gay men. Therefore, the hypothesis was not supported.

### **Exploratory Research**

An independent samples t-tests found only three significant items on The Revised Sociosexual Orientation Inventory. Non-heterosexual women ( $M = 5.11$ ,  $SD = 2.85$ ) rated item four, "Sex without love is OK," significantly higher than heterosexual women ( $M = 3.06$ ,  $SD = 2.46$ ),  $t(70) = 2.30$ ,  $p < .05$ . Non-heterosexual women ( $M = 4.67$ ,  $SD = 3.28$ ) rated item six, "I do not want to have sex with a person until I am sure we will have a long-term, serious relationship," significantly lower than heterosexual women ( $M = 6.86$ ,  $SD = 2.52$ ),  $t(70) = -2.35$ ,  $p < .05$ . Non-heterosexual women ( $M = 3.89$ ,  $SD = 2.62$ ) rated item seven, "How often do you have fantasies about having sex with someone with whom you are not in a committed relationship," significantly higher than heterosexual women ( $M = 2.56$ ,  $SD = 1.75$ ),  $t(70) = 2.00$ ,  $p < .05$ . See *Figure 2* for mean scores on each item, for both heterosexual and non-heterosexual women.

## **Discussion**

The purpose of the current study was to determine which pairings of human demographics were strongly correlated with negative and positive attitudes towards lesbians and gay men. It was hypothesized that single participants' sociosexuality scores would be positively correlated with attitudes towards lesbians and gay men. It was also hypothesized that African American's religiosity scores would be negatively correlated with attitudes towards lesbians and gay men. Finally, it was hypothesized that heterosexual males would have the most negative attitudes towards lesbians and gay men.

### **Relationship Status and Sociosexuality**

Past research has not evaluated the relationship between sociosexuality or relationship status and attitudes towards lesbians and gay men (Mouilso & Calhoun, 2012). The current research found that single participants with higher sociosexuality scores, or more unrestricted sociosexuality, had more negative attitudes towards lesbians and gay men than those with restricted sociosexuality. Unrestricted sociosexuality is defined by multiple sexual partners and less commitment. Therefore, those who are more open to this type of lifestyle are more likely to feel negatively about lesbians and gay men than those who find commitment more important and have fewer sexual partners. This finding did not support the original hypothesis. Because the majority of our sample was heterosexual, one possible hypothesis for the results found could be hetero-normative attitudes existing within the population. Further research should focus on why unrestricted sociosexuality is correlated with negative attitudes towards lesbians and gay men.

### **Race and Religiosity**

Past research found that participants high in religiosity were also high in prejudice and had negative attitudes towards lesbians and gay men (Whitley, 2009). Similarly, the current

research found that for African American participants, those high in religiosity had negative attitudes towards gay men. Whitley and Kite (1995) found that attitudes towards gay men were often less positive than attitudes towards lesbians. The present research found that African Americans high in religiosity had less negative attitudes towards lesbians than they did towards gay men. When working with multiculturalism within psychology, it is important to understand what may cause attitudes about non-heterosexuality to form. For example, knowing that African Americans high in religiosity are more likely to have negative attitudes towards lesbians and gay men, directs researchers to this demographic group. Examining this demographic group allows researchers to further indicate what social constructs, social roles, experiences, etc. may contribute to negative or positive attitudes about non-heterosexuality.

### **Gender and Attitudes Towards Lesbians and Gay Men**

Martinez and Hebl (2012) found no significant gender differences when observing attitudes towards openly gay service members. In contrast, other past research found that men had more negative attitudes towards lesbians and gay men than women (Whitley & Kite, 1995). Current research found that heterosexual women, high in religiosity and low in sociosexuality, had more positive attitudes towards both lesbians and gay men than non-heterosexual females. This finding poses more questions for future research, as to why non-heterosexual women would have negative attitudes towards lesbians. Past research found that heterosexual males had the most negative attitudes towards gay men than all other gender/sexual orientation combinations (Raja & Stokes, 1998). However, current research found no significant relationship between male's sexual orientation and attitudes towards gay men.

When dealing with discrimination towards the Lesbian and Gay communities, a large focus is put on developing allies. Training programs have been created and implemented for

helping people become allies. Knowing which demographic groups are more likely to have positive attitudes towards lesbians and gay men will help to target which groups of people may be more open to becoming allies for the Lesbian and Gay communities.

### **Exploratory Research**

Penke and Asendorpf (2008) revised the original inventory for measuring sociosexuality to include three dimensions: behavior, attitude, and desire. Current research examined the significance of the contribution of individual items in The Revised Sociosexual Orientation Inventory for heterosexual women. Current research found that only three items in the inventory to be significantly different for heterosexual and non-heterosexual women: “Sex without love is OK,” “I do not want to have sex with a person until I am sure that we will have a long-term, serious relationship,” and “How often do you have fantasies about having sex with someone with whom you do not have a committed relationship?” The three questions found significant represent the attitudes and desire components of the inventory but not the behavior category. These results could have an effect on the correlation found between sociosexuality and attitudes towards lesbians and gay men.

### **Limitations**

A limitation of the current study was the use of mainly correlational research, which does not allow for cause and effect relationships to be determined. Another limitation of the current study was the method of participant recruitment, which limited the population with regards to age, race, and sexual orientation. This study is not generalizable beyond college students.

### **Future Research**

Future research should expand the recruitment of participants to other departments on campus as well as to members of the community outside of the University. This would expand



the diversity of the population. Future research should also expand the study to attitudes towards orientations other than lesbians and gay men.

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*Appendix A*

Demographic Items

- 1. What gender do you associate yourself with?
  - Male
  - Female
  - Transgender
  - Transsexual
- 2. What is your race?
  - White
  - African American
  - Hispanic/Latino
  - Asian
  - Native American
  - Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. What sexual orientation do you associate yourself with?
  - Heterosexual
  - Homosexual
  - Bisexual
  - Transsexual
  - Asexual
- 4. What is your age from your last birthday?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 5. What is your current relationship status?
  - Single
  - In a relationship
  - Dating
  - Married
  - Divorced

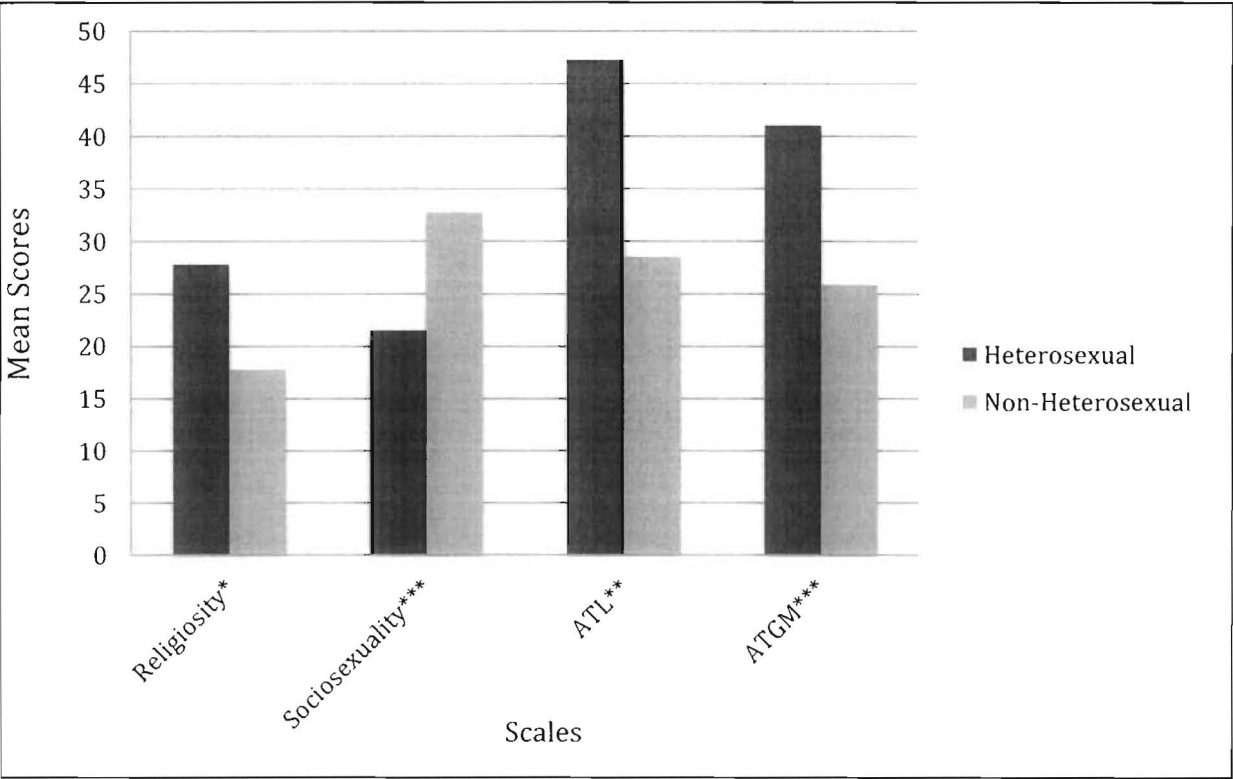


Figure 1. Mean differences for heterosexual and non-heterosexual female scores.

Note. ATL = Attitudes Towards Lesbians. ATGM = Attitudes Towards Gay Men. \* $p < .001$ .

\*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < 0.5$ .

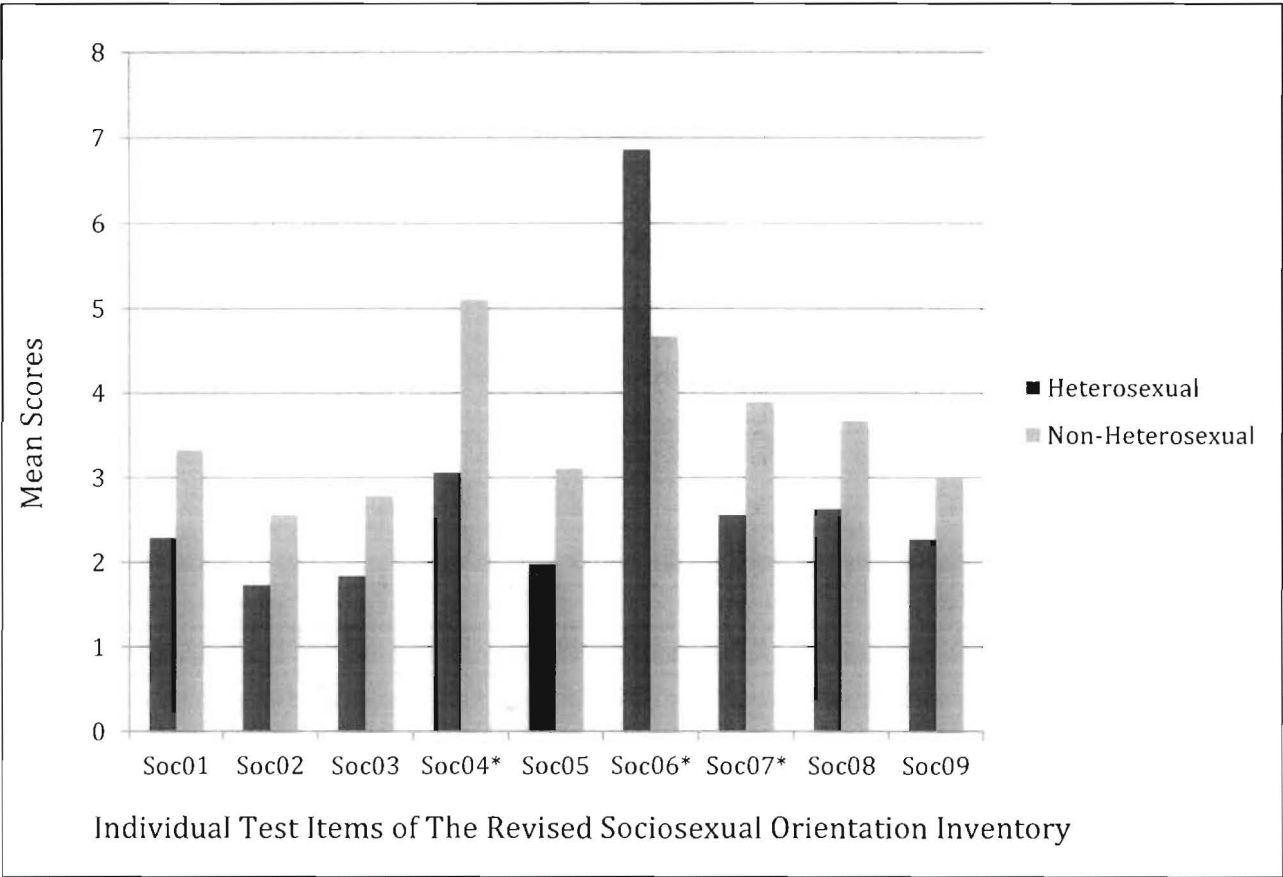


Figure 2. Mean differences for individual sociosexuality test items in heterosexual and non-heterosexual females.

Note. Soc04 = “Sex without love is ok.” Soc06 = “I do not want to have sex with a person until I am sure we will have a long-term, serious relationship.” Soc07 = “How often do you have fantasies about having sex with someone with whom you are not in a committed relationship?”

\* $p < .05$ .



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## Project Overview

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Title Human Demographics and Attitudes Toward Sexual Orientation

Principal Investigator Brattain, Chloe

The documents for this project can be accessed from the Designer.

Project Status as of: 04/28/2014

Reviewing Board	Initial Approval Date	Project Status	Expiration Date
Ball State University IRB, Muncie, IN	12/19/2013	Exempt	

Package 548491-1 is: Locked - Revisions Complete

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Ball State University IRB, Muncie, IN	12/11/2013	New Project	Exempt	12/19/2013	<a href="#">Review Details</a>

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